ERIC Document Resume | See Instruction Sheet | DATE OF RESUME 6/19/65 | DATE RECEIVED 6/15/65

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ERIC NUMBER	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.	DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW
ED002532	N.A.	N.A.	

4. AUTHOR(S): Schorr, Albin L.

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED: The Nonculture of Poverty

6. PUBLICATION TITLE: N.A.

7. EDITOR(S): N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN: Long Range ORG. Research Branch-Div. of Research and Statistics ST. Social Security CITY, STATE Admin., Washington, D.C. TELE. EXT. INST/LOC CODE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE: American Orthopsychiatric Assoc.

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
N.A.	N.A.	3/1964	10

MICROFILM COPY AVAILABLE: YES ☒ NO ☐

COPYRIGHT GRANTED: YES ☐ NO ☒

COPYRIGHT RELEASE FILED: YES ☐ NO ☐

TYPE OF REPORT: PROPOSAL ☐ IN-PROGRESS ☐ FINAL ☒ FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR: Speech

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

food	attitudes	Negro		
housing	discipline	poverty		
parents	emotions	culturally disadvantaged		
		racial relations		

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

Two observations are made about attitude and behavior: that attitudes associated with the culture of poverty are a realistic response to the facts of poverty, and that some people take a static view of poor people's attitudes so that they can remain unmoved or feel superior.

Food affects attitude and behavior. Lack of it causes depression, weariness, and inertia. Poor people then project the blame for their condition on others. Poor housing affects these people by making them depressed, pessimistic, passive, and unhealthy. In the home the young people lack parental control and discipline.

A Bibliography is included.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
	22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
	23. DURATION OR PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

CG Form 1

ED002532

WE Johnston
REISER
ISEAP

American Orthopsychiatric Association
March 19, 1964

THE NONCULTURE OF POVERTY*

I should make it plain that I have no quarrel with Oscar Lewis. He uses the term "culture of poverty" in a dynamic sense to express the interplay of circumstance and attitude. Rather, I am concerned with the corrupt use of the term that is gaining currency--among some whose prejudices it supports and among some who are clinicians and social scientists and ought to know better. In the corrupt usage, the culture of poverty is a thing in itself--a world outlook with obscure origins and only an accidental relation to reality.

My main business is to say something about the material determinants of attitude and behavior. To pretend that things or artifacts were all would, it must be conceded, be as simple-minded as to suppose that attitudes and rituals are all. It is difficult to describe the flowing interplay of thing and feeling; it is even more difficult to keep it in mind. Therefore, I shall be offering you one vulgarization to correct another.

Permit me two brief, introductory observations. First, the attitudes that are associated with the culture of poverty--orientation to the present, passivity, cynicism--are a realistic response to the facts of poverty. It is true that such attitudes undermine "higher horizons" programs and other promising demonstration programs. Yet I am not persuaded--certainly many poor people are not persuaded--that they can gain

*Alvin L. Schorr is Acting Chief of Long Range Research Branch, Division of Research and Statistics, Social Security Administration, Washington 25, D. C. Here, he expresses only his own opinions.

ED002532

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
Office of Education

This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated do not necessarily represent official Office of Education position or policy.

the carrot at the end of the stick: the price of admission and the attendant furs, perfumes, escorts, and manners to take them to more Beethoven concerts, or anything but child neglect and acute weariness if a woman is successful at leaving public assistance for a job of her own. The husbanding of psychic energy that accrues from passivity and scepticism must be important to psychic survival. I find myself often unsure whether a poor person does well to yield these attitudes. Is anyone sure?

Second, we may readily dismiss those who take a static view of poor people's attitudes in order to remain unaroused or to feel superior. There are more subtle seductions than these, however. For if poverty rests preeminently upon a system of values, how important becomes the sociologist who alone investigates and understands these values! How important become the teacher, the social worker, and the psychiatrist who are the powerful agents of value change! If, on the other hand, ordinary facts like money and housing are important, they are the domain of clerks and laborers or, at any rate, other technicians. Not many of us are prey to such seduction. But in a speech every now and then one hears the patronizing phrases and the circular reasoning that betray the siren call of self-importance.

Having offered you these unsupported observations, let me turn to my main business--to say a little about the effects of food and housing on attitude and behavior. It seems reasonable to start with food. I was led by an experience this summer to look through some clinical papers on nutrition. In one of the Hoovervilles that are scattered

around Paris, my wife and I became acquainted with a young Antioch student, working as a volunteer welfare aide. The people with whom she worked, a group of l'Association d'Aide a Toute Détresse, lived in the same type of huts and ate about the same food as those whom they were helping. I think Christine will not mind my observing how much she looked and acted like her clients--dry, cracked skin, gray color, nondescript appearance, and from early morning to night a great weariness. She showed unbelievable responsibility in her work but not liveliness, not optimism, not the venturesomeness that brought her to Paris.

I do not offer Christine as scientific evidence. However, knowing her has sent me to the literature on nutrition and I should like to quote to you from some of it. Following prolonged malnutrition, says one author,

> "...various functional changes occur. These functional changes are manifested clinically by symptoms usually placed in the neurasthenic syndrome. They include such common complaints as excessive fatigability, disturbances in sleep, inability to concentrate, 'gas,' heart consciousness, and various queer bodily sensations.... Occurrence [of these symptoms] as a manifestation of tissue depletion of certain nutrients is undoubted." (Jolliffe in C.N., p. 33) 1A/

Who, having worked with poor people, has not wondered about their aches and complaints? Do we wonder about drive and ambition? These are the symptoms that turn up with prolonged malnutrition: "depression, loss of ambition, impotence, and a sensation of being old." Again, "depression, apathy, and lethargy." 1B/ A more circumstantial account of depression appears in a study of a number of pregnant women. Their diet had been low in thiamine, calcium, and iron, and was improved to a recommended standard.

> "Previously /says the report/ they worried about everything; housework bothered them; they were unhappy and slovenly in appearance. After three weeks on the improved diet they were much tidier, their faces were washed, and their hair brushed. They were obviously interested in their appearance. They were also much more cheerful." 1C/

Finally--I translate here from sociology to psychology*--what of the observed tendency of poor people to project blame on others? A study of Canadian service personnel, who were being inadequately fed, arrived at this conclusion.

> "They blamed their poor performance not on themselves but on their officers.... Their reaction was that the other men had cheated. Everything was wrong except themselves." 1C/

I suppose it is not necessary to labor this point. In any case, I am not a nutritionist and cannot add anything to what the authors explicitly report. It is only important to observe that many symptoms that we take to be psychological or cultural may quite possibly be a consequence of malnutrition.

One fact ought perhaps, be added. Despite all our recent talk about poverty in the United States, it comes hard to us to believe that many people do not eat adequately. However, we estimate that at least one in five families with children chooses between an adequate diet and some other necessity. At least 5 million of our families with children probably lack some element of a minimally adequate diet. 4/ We can speak a little more exactly of our public assistance programs. In no more than two or three

---

*A sociological classification of values distinguishes between those who feel subjugated by nature, those who feel in harmony with it, and those who feel mastery over it. 2/ An element of the culture of poverty would be to feel subjugated or, at most, in harmony with nature. 3/ That is, if a poor person had difficulty, he would tend to project responsibility on other forces.

States in the country do public assistance agencies budget an amount for food that would be judged adequate by Department of Agriculture standards. 5/ In pointing to the impact of nutrition on attitudes, then, we are not discussing a rare phenomenon.

Let me turn now to housing. I have written elsewhere that the following effects spring from poor housing:

> "... a perception of one's self that leads to pessimism and passivity, stress to which the individual cannot adapt, poor health, and a state of dissatisfaction; pleasure in company but not in solitude, cynicism about people and organizations, a high degree of sexual stimulation without legitimate outlet, and difficulty in household management and child rearing; ...relationships that tend to spread out in the neighborhood rather than deeply into the family." 6/

(REREAD) We do not have time to discuss more than one of these effects. On the whole, effects such as those on health--safety, respiratory and skin diseases, and so forth--must be fairly evident. Let us look at the consequences for child rearing, as these are somewhat more complex.

It is common, in the slum areas of our cities, to observe how extensively family life is conducted out of doors. The pattern may be attributed to habit brought along from Puerto Rico, or Europe, or rural areas--depending on which slums one is considering. On the other hand, in a settlement house not so very far from here, I once questioned the soundness of a daily program for young teen agers. They were kept away from home every night until curfew at 10:00 p.m. It did not seem entirely a good thing. I pass the response on to you. These 13- and 14-year-olds live in apartments so

small that there is no room for them. When they have eaten, sitting on stools and a couch around the table, they drift outside. Either they will be at the settlement house or on the streets, but not at home. A study of poor families in the District of Columbia makes this point quite simply.

> In these so--called apartments, /it says/, there is no place for children.... The close quarters, the drabness, the lack of something to do drives these children into the street. 7/

Elsewhere, the same group of researchers observe that these children escape parental control at quite early ages, some as early as the age of six. 7/ One can hardly overlook the relevance of such a pattern to the fact that children cannot reasonably be kept inside. We must ask the simple questions first--must we not? If young children are to be disciplined they must be within reach.

The children are, of course, sometimes inside the house. They come home to sleep, for example. A study of working class Negroes, in this city of Chicago at the close of the war, found that the majority slept less than five hours a night. The reason: there was simply not space for beds. 8/ Lack of sleep has its effect on children's growth and behavior. Implications spring to the mind too, do they not, about sexual relations between adults and about sexual stimulation of children. Nor can one discuss child rearing with a mother who has slept only three or four hours and leap to a cultural explanation of her lethargy.

When children play inside the house they are, of course, underfoot. I have seen no studies of the tension that arises between parents and children in very crowded quarters, perhaps because the result is obvious. There has

been a study of families with two children living in two-bedroom apartments. They experience tension--because there is not room for the activities of parents and children at once. 9/ Because it touches on a matter of current interest, I must cite one more study. The University of Sheffield has looked into the manner in which young people make career choices. Where do they get guidance? What advice from their parents? For children in decent housing there are other answers, but youths in crowded housing get virtually no help from their parents. They are together, whatever their activity, in one room. A youngster is having dinner, a cowboy show is on television, a neighbor drops in to see the mother. Guidance takes place in passing and is conducted in shouts. "You can't hang about this summer, boy! Not like last year." And the boy's irritated answer is swallowed up in the neighbor's story or in a television gun-battle 10/

I have an uncomfortable feeling that the things I am saying are self-evident. They ought to be self-evident. If a reasonable counselling interview requires separation and freedom from interruption, then many of the normal transactions of families must also. If these simple physical requirements are not met, family relationships must develop in other ways. They may develop in such patterns as these: Children freed or freeing themselves early from parental control. A good deal of disorganization in everyday routines. Little studying, poor work habits and self-discipline. Little communication between parents and children. When we have seen these characteristics among the same people year after year, we may come to think there is some binding relationship. Then we are likely to talk about a culture of poverty. But perhaps the link, simpler and less esoteric, lies in the stark facts of the way they live.

I have already excused myself for over-simplifying matters. I should like, in conclusion, at least to make two points about the interrelationship of thing and attitude. For this purpose, let me say a few words about the Negro sit-in movement. Sociologists have now confessed that, according to all that they knew of it, the sit-in movement should never have happened. 11/ Their problem--a common professional problem--lies in being captured by smooth trend curves. Moreover, we had achieved an oh-so-thorough understanding of the Negro matriarchal family. The boy, indulged but never treated as fully masculine, grows into a cavalier but withal insecure and undependable man. And he learns, for his survival, to turn aggression in or off. How, indeed, could such youths organize demonstrations with semimilitary care and precision? How, indeed, can they walk picket lines with a discipline that does not yield to the most humiliating provocations?

There are several answers, two of them relevant here. First, Negro parents have for many years taught their children the principles of equality and opportunity. As studies reported with care, these precepts were surrounded with cautions, stated and merely cued, that Negroes nevertheless may not assert their rights. ("We are equal but some are more equal than others.") We have been attentive, have we not, to the denial rather more than to the affirmation. Yet, when the time came when it was not too dangerous, clearly the affirmation was present to be acted upon. Second, it must be suspected that Negro youngsters are using for rather a different purpose a discipline

which they learned from segregation. Because they had to, they learned to block out white people from perception and to seem not to observe their behavior, whether provocative, humiliating, or only private. This discipline is not greatly altered, merely converted to a different purpose, in picketing and sitting-in. Thus, I suggest that we attend to the affirmative attitudes of poor people. Further habits and attitudes are like bits of furniture. They may persist in the clutter of one's accumulations, but in new circumstances they readily serve new objectives.

Let me conclude. In Central America, where iodine deficiency has long been common, dolls and religious statues are modeled with typical goiters. So much do the Indians accept goiters as normal! 12/ I have suggested that our image of the attitudes of poor people may contain its goiters. Poor nutrition and poor housing may, unaided, produce many of the attitudes we associate with poverty. Because the attitudes persist, we should not suppose that they are an independent phenomenon. They depend on material circumstances and are probably functional in relation to them. We ask too lightly that the attitudes be yielded if we do not also assure that they are no longer needed. Finally, we need not necessarily envision a thoroughgoing change of attitudes. If material circumstances are changed as, for example, the overwhelming threat that faces the Negro has changed, we may find attitudes that seemed wholly negative turned to constructive purposes.

Bibliography

1. Norman Jolliffe, F. F. Tisdall, and Paul R. Cannon, Editors, Clinical Nutrition, Harper and Brothers, 1950.

   A. Norman Jolliffe, "The Pathogenesis of Deficiency Disease," p. 33.

   B. Ancel Keys, "Caloric Deficiency and Starvation," pp. 241-2.

   C. Frederick F. Tisdall, "The Relation of Nutrition to Health," p. 748.

2. Committee on the Family of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, "Integration and Conflict in Human Behavior," August 1954.

3. Frank Riessman, The Culturally Deprived Child, 1962, Harper and Brothers. And Leonard Schneiderman, "The Culture of Poverty--An Effort at Definition," unpublished paper, mimeographed. Based on a doctoral dissertation at the University of Minnesota, July 1963.

4. Mollie Orshansky, "Children of the Poor," Social Security Bulletin, July 1963.

5. Report of the Advisory Council on Public Assistance, GPO, January 1960; and Ellen J. Perkins, "How Much is Enough?" a paper presented at the Biennial Round Table Conference of the American Public Welfare Association, Washington, D. C., December 6, 1963.

6. Alvin L. Schorr, Slums and Social Insecurity, GPO, 1963, pp. 31-2.

7. Report of Roscoe Lewis, quoted by Eve Edstrom, Washington Post, January 12, 1964. And Hylan Lewis, "Child Rearing Among Low Income Families," address to the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, June 8, 1961, processed.

8. Allison Davis, "Motivation of the Under-Privileged Worker," Industry and Society, ed. by William Foote Whyte, McGraw-Hill, 1946.

9. Robert O. Blood, Jr., Developmental and Traditional Child-Rearing Philosophies and Their Family Situational Consequences, Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1952.

10. M. P. Carter, Home, School, and Work, Pergamon Press, 1963.

11. Kurt W. Back, "Sociology Encounters the Southern Protest Movement for Desegregation," address to the International Sociological Association, Washington, D. C., September 1962; and Everett C. Hughes, "Race Relations and the Sociological Imagination," American Sociological Association, Los Angeles, August 28, 1963.

12. William J. Darby, "International Cooperation in Nutrition Research and Planning," Agriculture, v. III of Science, Technology, and Development, GPO, 1962.